

Guiding Elementary-Age Children Through Stress and Trauma

Children respond to sensitivity, warmth and reassurance. They may need extra support. Be open, honest and patient, and use language appropriate to the child's age.

- Let children know what we know and what we do NOT know. Information should be accurate and literal. (You don't have to have all the answers. If you are not sure how to answer a question, let them know that you will think about it and get back to them later.)
- Be careful not to overload them with information-let their questions be your guide
- Reassure children of their personal safety.
- Listen to the children. Let them talk about their thoughts, feelings and fears, & ask their own questions.
- Be aware that a child's reactions may be very different from your own.
- Provide empathy for the child's feelings, which may cover a considerable range.
- Allow children to engage in constructive ways to express their feelings about what happened (e.g., write a letter or draw a picture, make a poster/collage).
- Give out hugs freely. (Young children often seek closeness during these troubled times.)
- Teach them to ask for what they need.
- Identify support people the child can talk to and arrange for them to communicate with their support people..
- Be consistent with household routines as much as possible to assure a sense of stability.
- Encourage physical activity such as taking a walk, dancing, playing outdoors, or practicing yoga.
- Read a silly or funny book together or watch a funny children's video to help relieve stress.

If you have questions or concerns about how your child is coping with stress or trauma they have experienced, you may contact your school counselor.